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ABSTRACT

The public relations case studies/campaigns class entails teaching students how to die and then come back to life. As students must learn to take a critical look at complex public and social issues, teachers should create an environment in which the students feel comfortable with the process of psychological reconstruction. Students must be taught to "die"...to discard the "student" perspective and to adopt the perspective of a business executive who lives in a "pressure cooker." Instructors need to make students realize that every public relations decision reflects a moral or ethical stance. Ideally, students should prepare case studies of campaigns in one class, then create their own campaigns in a separate class. In preparing studies, students should ask critical questions about campaigns, gather data from public relations representatives, and be ready to field questions from other students. A course focusing solely on student campaigns would enable the students to work on more detailed projects. Students should follow a four-step plan, which includes research, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the campaign. Public relations competitions may prompt students to take their work more seriously, adopt a more professional attitude about it, and begin to move from student to practitioner. (Thirty-three references are attached.) (SG)

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# Teaching the Public Relations Case Studies/Campaigns Class

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The public relations case studies/campaigns class is basically the process of teaching students how to die and then come back to life. For, this class **must be** the class in which students take a hard, critical look at complex public and social issues. Most students need to learn to disassemble to do that; they must learn to "shed the layers" of innocence and naivete that preclude them from appropriate situational and global analysis. Therefore, teachers of the case studies/campaigns class must be prepared to construct an environment in which the students feel comfortable (because they will be uncomfortable) with the process of psychological reconstruction. In essence, teachers need to help students adopt the "mind set" of an ethical practitioner within the framework of a highly diverse, deadline-prone political environment, which may continuously challenge an individual's values.

The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education (Commission, 1987) more or less mandates this type of critical approach to the case studies/campaigns class when it uses the following language to describe these selected objectives of a public relations program of study:

> 2. Identify, elaborate and integrate the defining concepts and theoretical schemes which can be appropriately used to give public relations practice intellectual content and ethical warranty.
>
> 4. Provide students with an understanding of (a) the professional and ethical problems confronting the

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> public relations fields and its individual practitioners; (b) the technical and strategic tasks and responsibilities of public relations practitioners; (c) the administrative-managerial role of public relations activity in various organizations and the social value of such activity to the operations, integrity and public acceptance of these organizations; (d) the social and cultural milieu in which public relations practitioners and their associated organizations must function.
>
> 8. Draw on critical concepts and on empirical models of public relations administration found in the private and public sectors and in profit and not-for-profit organizations to enable students to analyze and resolve ethical and management issues. (Commission, 1987, p. 16-17)

These objectives make clear that the Commission sees the public relations emphasis of study as more than a pragmatic, technically-oriented skills acquisitions program. Therefore, it behooves those of us who teach public relations to take seriously our mandate to challenge students to think beyond the concept of merely "matching" appropriate strategy with appropriate campaign tactics in a case studies/campaigns class.

Scope of the course

With this in mind, an inclusive interpretation should be made when reading the Commission's guidelines for course content of the case studies/campaigns class. The course is listed under the Public Relations Strategy and Implementation section in the Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education. According to the Commission, "the general intent (of this course) is to place the student in a managerial, decision-making role in which the primary requirement is to think in planning and program-execution terms" (p. 25). The Commission goes on to state that public relations management "usually entails decision-making

under risk and uncertainty" (p. 26).

Essentially, the Commission says the case studies/campaigns class is an exercise in teaching students appropriate goal-setting and strategy selection for public relations campaigns. Yet, the important factor to remember is to teach such techniques in ways that students will be cognizant of the political, economic, organizational and social pressures that will have an impact on, and will be impacted by, any decisions made throughout the process. That means addressing <u>first</u> values, ethics, morals, commitments and responsibilities of organizations in society, and of public relations practitioners in organizations. And, that means teaching students to "die"...to discard the "student" perspective and to adopt the perspective of a business executive who lives in a "pressure cooker."

How do we do this? By first getting down to the basics. Many of us have told students, 'you cannot <u>not</u> communicate.' In the case studies/campaigns class, we must tell students, 'you can never make a public relations decision that does not reflect a moral or ethical stance.' Because whatever program is delineated, and whatever strategies and tactics are selected to meet a program's goals, the practitioner and the organization have made those decisions based on a series of choices. "Choices" mean some options were discarded, while others were included. "Choices" mean some opportunities were missed, while others were addressed. "Choices" mean some groups "lost," while other groups "won." And, finally, "choices" mean that the comprehensive public relations program developed to meet

specified goals is consistent with the organization's perception of its moral obligation within society.

Course title/structure within sequence of courses

Obviously, it is more likely that teachers and students of public relations will delve into ethical issues more deeply given sufficient time to do so. Case studies/campaigns classes are organized differently at different campuses. (To my way of thinking, however, the organization of courses is, in fact, a reflection of the school's and professor's moral and ethical judgments about the necessary components of a comprehensive sequence of study in public relations.) And, the nature of the structure of the course(s), the content and subject matter within the course(s), and the manner in which material is presented, all communicate to our students our moral judgments about the efficacy of the class(es).

**Case studies/campaigns combination**

On some campuses, the case studies class may be combined with the campaigns class. This is the basic minimum guideline of the Commission. In such a class, students should be required (a) to study "successful" and "unsuccessful" professional campaigns via analysis and discussion for roughly half of the semester, and (b) to develop a comprehensive campaign strategy of their own for a particular client for the remainder of the semester.

For the latter part of the semester, the "client" may be real or "imagined." That is, students may work for a local client on campus to aid in the development of a limited or

comprehensive campaign. For example, the Student Government Office may need help in promoting a series of extra-curricular leadership modules on campus. The Student Government Office may meet with students from the case studies/campaigns class to discuss ways in which student attendance at the modules can be increased. Or, in the case of an "imaginary" client, students may select a client of interest and may propose to develop a targeted public relations campaign for that client. For example, a student may wish to propose a special event to celebrate the 15th anniversary of a marketing division of IBM. The student would then gather materials from/about IBM and that particular division (annual/division reports; capability literature; public relations/marketing/promotion plans) for use in the development of a proposal for the marketing division.

**Case studies and campaigns as separate classes**

Ideally, students will have the opportunity to study professional campaigns in depth before embarking on the creation of their own campaign. Separate courses for case studies and campaigns offers students this chance.

In the **case studies** class, then, appropriate time can be taken in the initial class periods to help students understand the cultural climate in which public relations practitioners work. Through a series of exercises described later, students can be systematically taught to critically analyze issues that face practitioners and the organizations that employ them. After this process is completed, students can be challenged to review one or more actual campaigns by means of a presentation to other

class members. Students have to ask critical questions about the campaigns they review, including: Why was this campaign developed? Whose interests does the campaign serve? What were the objectives of the campaign? Were the objectives measurable? Did the campaign accomplish its objectives? What was left out...what could have been addressed in the campaign but was not? What elements in the political, economic and social environment enhanced/hampered the success of the campaign?

Students should be expected to gather data for their presentation from public relations representatives of the campaign the students chose to cover. In addition, they should be expected to seek out and include alternate viewpoints (newspaper articles, magazine articles, personal interviews with the actors involved or impacted on by the campaign, scholarly articles or journal reports) on the success/failure of the campaign. Depending on course requirements, the gathering of background data for presentational purposes can take several weeks.

In addition, the student making the presentation should be expected to field questions from a prepared group of students who are eager to challenge the efficacy of the presentation and/or public relations program. This type of expectation not only encourages active debate, but helps the presenter appreciate the sometimes tenuous circumstances in which practitioners find themselves. It also tends to encourage students to be thoroughly prepared: to "think through" possible questions/scenarios/ explanations/actions that the public relations practitioner and

organization must address in any campaign.

When the case studies class is taught separately from the campaigns class then, students can benefit from a deeper understanding of what constitutes true public relations planning. This understanding lays the foundation for the course which should follow case studies: campaigns.

The **campaigns** class can now be taught with the knowledge that students have been encouraged to critically dissect public relations approaches. Students are now both more aware of the wide range of options and approaches that can be taken in the development of a campaign, and better equipped to deal with the unavoidable conflicts and constraints that are inherent in client-practitioner relationships. They have "seen" this campaign in other campaigns; they have a better vision of the range of possibilities. And, because students have a more comprehensive viewpoint, teachers are able to devote more time to "fine-tuning" student or client suggestions, and less time to "correcting" suggestions that were based on faulty assumptions or general lack of knowledge of process.

This also means that the campaigns students undertake can be more comprehensive in nature. Whereas, in a combined case studies/campaigns class, it might be a reasonable expectation for students to turn in a 10- to 15-page proposal, in the campaigns class alone, students might be required to turn in a 40- to 50-page proposal. There's an obvious difference in the kind of research and background work that can be included in the expanded proposal format. For example, let's say you require the

following elements in a campaign proposal:

**Background/Statement of Opportunity**

**Program Objectives**

**Target Audiences**

**Tactics and Strategies**

**Timeline**

**Creative Theme**

**Budget**

**Evaluation Measures**

Just looking at one of these elements for illustrative purposes--Target Audiences--reveals a major difference in the learning scenario that might take place under an expanded proposal. In a ten-page proposal, with eight campaign elements, the student will not be able to do much more than merely "list" the proposed target audiences. In an expanded proposal, however, the student will be forced to "think strategically." That is, the student will have to provide a statement of rationale for choosing each target audience. This is a much more complex process for the student. The student is forced to weigh pros and cons, strengths and weaknesses, and other factors when a rationale is required. And teachers are not always left "guessing" as to how and why a student selected those particular target audiences.

Other content areas in case studies/campaigns courses

Besides case reviews, presentations, and the development of a campaign strategy for a "client," there are some other fundamental areas that should be included in a case studies/campaigns class. These areas should be included whether

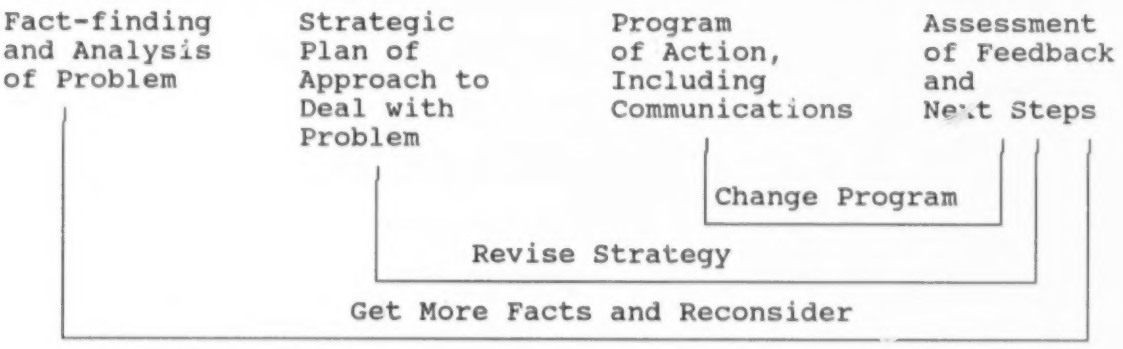
or not the class is taught separately as two courses, or in a combined fashion. The areas that should be covered include:

1. The four-step process
2. Hegelian inquiry system
3. Campaign competitions

**The four-step process**

Most major textbooks in public relations offer appropriate reviews of the four-step process of campaign development. The process might be labeled, "public relations process," or "problem solving process," or some other name, but the four-step non-static procedure is pertinent to campaign development.

Center and Walsh (1985, p. 24) outline the process as follows:


Fact-finding and Analysis of Problem
Strategic Plan of Approach to Deal with Problem
Program of Action, Including Communications
Assessment of Feedback and Next Steps
Change Program
Revise Strategy
Get More Facts and Reconsider

Center and Walsh devote nearly a chapter in their text, Public Relations Practices, Managerial Case Studies and Problems, to the explanation of the four-step process. Their diagram highlights key areas covered in the process.

Wakefield (in press) provides a good, short description of the process. The descriptors of the four steps include:

1) **research**, which sets the stage for all future campaign planning and involves thorough analysis of the organization's structure, resources, history, mission, products and/or services.
2) **planning**, which entails description of the campaign purpose, theme, target public profiles, objectives, time constraints, budgetary considerations, media and event selection, creative approaches, logistics and contingency plans.
3) **implementation**, which involves a) securing plan approval, necessary personnel, suppliers, media time and space, legal clearances, and budget; b) creation of campaign materials and coordination of media and events; and c) monitoring of campaign effectiveness.
4) **evaluation**, which requires analysis of campaign monitoring, progress toward stated objectives, feedback from key internal and external publics, relationship to the organization's mission, competitor's reactions, campaign's effects on products/services, and a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis.

Regardless of the source used to describe the four-step process, it is essential that students understand the order in which elements should occur in campaign development. This does not mean to imply that the process is linear or static. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is continuous, ongoing, in constant flux and motion. But, students should recognize certain facets. For an obvious example, students should not begin to create samples of news releases before they have determined to overall purpose of the campaign, the importance of media to the campaign, target audiences, and a number of other factors. One way to help students remember the four-step process model is to ascribe an acronym to the phases. The acronym, FACE, in fact, works quite well. "F" represents the fact-finding step; "A" represents the approach or action plan; "C" represents the communication phase; and "E" represents the evaluation of the

program.

Schematically, the acronym works well because it serves as an additional reminder to students. And that is that they notice--on "face value"--that "E" follows "F." When the acronym is just written out,

**F A C E**

students can see that "E" follows "F." But, since we all know that "F" really follows "E" in the alphabet world, it is important to always be cognizant of "E" (evaluation) before "F" (fact-finding) even begins. In other words, every campaign that is created must be accountable. By keeping the evaluative component in mind each step of the way, students are more likely to "think" in terms of accountability. This example also helps to illustrate the point that students should never expect to take anything in a case studies/campaigns class on "face value"!

**Hegelian inquiry system**

Those words might be echoed by Ralph Kilmann (1984) in his book, Beyond the Quick Fix. Kilmann makes the point that because we live in a complex, ever-changing environment, it is almost impossible to cope with all the change. And so organizations find themselves, too often, attempting to "fix" complex problems with "band-aid" solutions. He argues for a comprehensive, integrative approach to confront and solve organizational dilemmas. One method he proposes to help individuals see beyond the "face value" of issues is the hegelian inquiry system. To illustrate his point, he contrasts this model with the Lockean inquiry system.

**Two Inquiring Systems**

| Lockean | Hegelian |
|---|---|
| Assumes the existence of simple problems | Assumes problems are complex |
| Group of experts can find agreement via consensus | Each person can only address a portion of the solution |
| Extreme positions eliminated | Extreme positions are scrutinized |
| Support for the middle is achieved; "answers" gravitate toward the center. Minority views are discarded. | Wisdom is not in the majority, but in the minority view (as integrated and synthesized). Truth is revealed via dialectic debate. The final conclusion may not be any of the initial suggestions. |
| Converges to the final point by ignoring differences | Diverges from initial position before it moves to synthesis |

This simple division of approaches to the problem-solving process can illuminate some of the reasons why practitioners and students sometimes come up with "solutions" that do little to solve "problems." If the divergence of opinion is systematically eliminated in a search for creative response, then ultimately both "creative" and "response" will be eliminated. Kilmann argues for consideration of every conceivable viewpoint.

The Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) theme for its most recent national conference in Dallas captured the essence of Kilmann's point. The theme, "Creating Consensus from Diversity," underscored the inherent value of divergent viewpoints when working toward harmonious solutions. In fact, Pat Jackson (1989) made the point at a professional development workshop at that conference that the key to producing desired

behavior of targets is via networking. To Jackson, "networking" is working with opinion leaders/influentials of "important" groups. And, "important" groups are groups that are most closely affected by, or those that can have an effect upon, desired outcomes. If community opinion leaders (which can be bowling leagues, pool buddies, shopping pals, members of parent-teacher groups, etc.) are left out of consideration when a campaign strategy is formulated, then, Jackson feels, the desired behavioral outcome will not come into fruition.

So, those who develop public relations campaigns cannot **presume to know** the desires, wishes, hopes, dreams, likes, and dislikes of a divergent population. To achieve desired behavioral outcomes, campaign strategists must assume that the campaign and the targets and the issues are complex. They must consider the "voices" of the many, not the "few" (which might be the people making the campaign proposal!). And, after the voices of the many are considered and heard, it is then the job of the campaign strategist to create harmony among the voices; to create a campaign that will truly work.

Students should be encouraged to practice both inquiry systems before they embark on cases analyses, and certainly before they start to create comprehensive campaigns. Teachers can set up in-class situations in which students "see" how the different inquiry systems produce quite different results.

**Campaign competitions**

The final area that should be included as part of the

experience of a case studies/campaigns class is the participation in pre-structured national case studies competitions. National competitions for public relations students have included the following: the Bateman competition, NutraSweet, Nestle, Standard Oil, and the SIUE Campaign for Peace, among others. Competing for national recognition encourages students to "test their ideas" among their peers. Because the competitions are deemed somewhat prestigious, students tend to "rise to the occasion." They tend to take their work more seriously; they tend to adopt a more "professional" attitude. They also have the real benefit of recognizing that they <u>are</u> competing. They are not operating in a vacuum. They are not merely working for a grade. They are working for personal (and, perhaps) school or departmental recognition. They begin to develop a broader view of what they are doing...and that is all part of the process of "shedding the layers" and moving from "student" to "practitioner."

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